

Chapel Hill, NC - By CHERYL JOHNSTON, STAFF WRITER, Chapel Hill News

Senior citizens at The Cedars in Meadowmount raised as many concerns about Medicare and Iraq as they did the future of Social Security during a visit from U.S. Rep. David Price on Friday afternoon.

Several of the more than 50 residents who gathered to hear the congressman's views asked Price how they could get more attention turned to Medicare funding rather than the privatization of Social Security.

"This Social Security is not going to affect any of us. Medicare really could be a greater problem for people our age," said Kenneth Hoffman, after the event.

Price spoke with Chapel Hill senior citizens at both The Cedars and the Carol Woods Retirement Community to express his views on Social Security at a time when some Republicans support privatization of the system.

Price told the seniors that Social Security is not nearly in the crisis that his political opponents are describing.

Price cited two dates, 2018 and 2052. In 13 years, Social Security will cease to take in more money than the system distributes, he said. And in 40-plus years, there could be a shortfall as high as 20 percent, Price said.

"That's a challenge, not a crisis," Price said.

Some of his audience voiced agreement when it came time to pass the microphone. No one disagreed.

Ina Evans likened the talk of a Social Security crisis to the level of concern the nation's leader and citizens gave to possible weapons of mass destruction in Iraq leading up to the war there.

"The thing that's been bothering me is I feel that the priority I feel is being put on the Social Security problems is like the weapons of mass destruction," Evans said.

Price acknowledged Evans' sentiment, but explained that with Social Security on the president's agenda, the talk of a crisis should be clarified rather than ignored.

"I think this is going to have to play out, really," Price said.

When asked why Democrats aren't talking more about shortfalls in funds for Medicare, Price said it would take a bipartisan commitment to contain the problem.

"I do not know exactly what the formula is going to be for Medicare," Price said.

Tax cuts, Veteran's Affairs, and the Senate confirmation of Alberto Gonzales for attorney general were other issues that the senior citizens raised.

Price also heard from a couple of constituents concerned about the president's request for billions more to be spent in Iraq.

"I'm concerned about the deficit and how we can go about reducing the deficit and at the same time support our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq," said Davis Bingham.

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